

VZCZCXYZ0005
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSF #0506/01 2531618
ZNY CCCCC ZZH (CCY ADX0AEBDAC MSI7233)
O 101618Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6307
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEADWD/DA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000506

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED NF TO PARA CAPTIONS)

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2029
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: U.S. FORCE REDUCTIONS IN EUROPE: VIEW FROM BULGARIA

REF: A. USNATO 329
[1](#)B. BERLIN 935

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires John Ordway for reasons 1.4 (b)/(d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Bulgaria would see a major reduction in U.S. forces in Europe as a sign of U.S. disengagement from European security during a period of growing concern over stability in the Western Balkans, Caucasus and Black Sea region. Partnership with the United States has been the bedrock of Bulgarian security policy through successive governments. The basis of this partnership is frequent U.S.-Bulgaria military exercises at our joint facilities and regular contact between service members in Bulgaria and the United States -- all of which is already threatened by the current shortage of U.S. troops available for training. A drawdown of U.S. troops in Europe will lead to reduced participation in joint exercises and cancellation of plans to station U.S. forces at the Task Force-East bases on regular rotations. This reduction in presence will unavoidably delay Bulgaria's development into a fully interoperable ally and likely lead to a decline in contributions to overseas missions. It will also cast doubts on the permanency of the U.S. commitment to NATO and could lead to a rethinking of Bulgaria's broader strategic orientation. END SUMMARY.

BEYOND ARTICLE FIVE

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004 as part of a broad effort to show itself to be a fully European country. Unlike other Eastern European allies, for historical reasons Bulgaria's population looks more favorably on Russia and does not see Moscow as a direct territorial threat. Bulgarian leaders are less concerned that a drawdown in Europe will prevent the U.S. from responding forcefully to an Article 5 contingency. Rather, they worry about a gradual U.S. disengagement from Europe and the lack of will to respond to crises at the region's borders. Bulgaria is keenly aware that security gains in Bosnia and Kosovo could disintegrate rapidly, a development that would be devastating to Bulgaria as it relies heavily on transport routes through the Western Balkans. The Bulgarian government sees active and consistent U.S. engagement in the Black Sea as similarly essential to Bulgarian security.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) While Bulgaria does not view Russia as a direct threat, its leaders readily acknowledge concern over Russia's intentions in the regions around its borders. Bulgaria is concerned that a significantly reduced U.S. presence in Europe could curtail our capacity and willingness to mediate regional issues or prevent minor conflicts from escalating.

UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL

¶4. (C/NF) In 2006, two years after entering NATO, Bulgaria signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement allowing the permanent stationing of up to 2,500 U.S. service members on four bases.

For a country that did not allow such a privilege to Soviet troops during the Cold War era, this was an historic policy decision and a decisive step in solidifying the United States as Bulgaria's preeminent security partner. To date, however, a shortage of U.S. troops available for joint training has prevented full utilization of these facilities.

¶5. (C/NF) The Bulgarian military's training plan is now fully dependent on its joint exercises with us and it relies on these exercises to meet force goals and prepare for overseas missions. U.S. investment in construction and upgrades to the joint facilities in Bulgaria is expected to exceed USD 100 million. It is not clear how the United States could achieve a substantial return on investment should a major drawdown in U.S. forces take place. Moreover, once the facilities are complete in 2011, the Bulgarians expect a significant increase in joint training opportunities. Bulgaria's leaders across the political spectrum have bucked public opinion to support the bases, and now they face a disappointing result, likely to be seen as further evidence of U.S. disengagement from the region.

SEE YOU IN KABUL

¶6. (C/NF) Bulgarian overseas military operations, particularly in Afghanistan, are predicated on U.S. assistance, training and joint exercises. U.S. assistance helps to ensure that troops are properly equipped, and joint exercises help ensure that soldiers are adequately prepared for coalition operations once they arrive in theater. The Bulgarian government does not view overseas missions as a quid pro quo for U.S. assistance and joint exercises, and Bulgaria would almost certainly continue with some very low level of participation in NATO operations even without the benefit of U.S. training. It is inevitable, however, that a significant reduction in training opportunities would lead to a substantial decrease in the size, capabilities and impact of Bulgarian forces in overseas missions.

¶7. (C/NF) Bulgaria is a proud NATO member, but to a large extent it sees NATO as a means to keep the United States engaged in European security. Like other Eastern European countries, it worries that a sharp reduction in the U.S. presence in Europe would reduce NATO to a "talk shop" or "political club". It puts much greater stock in its bilateral security relationship with the United States than in NATO-level political engagement, and is wary of ever-increasing NATO contribution requests paired with decreasing U.S. support. For Bulgaria, deployments to Afghanistan are linked both operationally and politically with U.S. engagement. The Bulgarians see joint U.S.-Bulgaria deployments as the result of a long-term joint training program; they are not prepared for a scenario where the only time they see U.S. forces is in Afghanistan.

¶8. (C/NF) COMMENT: In 2011, when construction at the joint facilities in Bulgaria is complete, the United States will have a modern, flexible location for training at a strategic intersection between the Black Sea and the Western Balkans. Due primarily to a shortage of U.S. service members available for training, these bases are not used to their full potential, and there is no road map for how to rectify this. A reduction in our Europe-based forces would ensure that these facilities remain permanently underutilized. Bulgaria believes it can contribute to NATO operations in Afghanistan, and also believes that the joint bases it hosts can play a positive role in achieving NATO's goal of creating a Europe whole, free and at peace with itself. Both are dependent upon regular U.S. military engagement here and a robust U.S. presence in Europe as a whole.

ORDWAY